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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAN SALVADOR 002401

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TO ADMIRAL STAVRIDIS FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [OVIP](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: YOUR VISIT TO EL SALVADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) I'm delighted that you'll be visiting El Salvador. Your visit comes in a string of recent high-level visits, and your presence here will underline the importance of El Salvador's contribution to coalition efforts in Iraq. Also, it will offer a boost to our efforts to address the nation's most pressing problem: a public security crisis that has spiraled out of control. The Salvadorans will press you for concrete signs of US appreciation for their presence in Iraq and will urge you to help address aging equipment issues. Minister of Defense will likely request help in supporting long-term medical needs for OIF wounded. We should support GOES requests that reinforce our shared counter-drug, counter-trafficking and public security goals. Your GOES interlocutors may raise the issue of MNNA-like status for El Salvador, though the GOES have been inconsistent in its pursuit of MNNA.

Political/Economic Overview and Migration Issues

¶2. (C) President Elias Antonio "Tony" Saca of the governing ARENA party assumed office June 1, 2004 after winning a strongly-contested presidential race with 57.7 percent of votes cast. President Saca's center-right ARENA party holds 34 of 84 seats in the Legislative Assembly, but aligns with smaller parties to form a working majority on important issues. The leftist FMLN holds 32 seats. Presidential, legislative, and municipal elections will be held in early 2009. The campaign is off to an early start since the FMLN nominated its candidate in October. This may result in the ARENA party nominating a candidate earlier than planned. President Saca has made the reinvigoration of El Salvador's economy, the creation of jobs, and improvements in the nation's infrastructure his highest priorities; however, staggering rates of violent crime deflect attention from his economic priorities. The public security crisis could have a major negative impact on 2009 presidential and legislative elections. We are working closely with the GOES to address this crisis, both by providing resources where we can and by advising the Government on police, legal and criminal procedure reforms.

¶3. (SBU) The economy has been growing slowly at only about two percent per year since 1999, despite its excellent fundamentals. However, last year El Salvador achieved its largest GDP growth rate in a decade, 4.2 percent. El Salvador was the first nation to sign and implement CAFTA-DR; early results are encouraging. In 2007, the positive trend continues with an estimated economic growth rate of 4.5 percent. Some twenty-five percent of Salvadorans live in the United States, many illegally. Since the 2001 earthquakes, between 250,000 and 280,000 Salvadorans have benefited from Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and have been able to live and work legally in the United States. Remittances from Salvadorans living abroad provide an important source of income for their families in El Salvador. In 2006, remittances amounted to \$3.3 billion, approximately 18% of GDP. Public opinion polls also show that 7 out of 10 Salvadorans would immigrate to the United States if given the chance. The U.S. debate over

immigration reform is followed very closely here.

Civilian-Military Relations

¶4. (C) The Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) are capable, professional, and subordinate to civilian authority. The military consistently receives high approval ratings in public opinion polls, due largely to its response to national emergencies, including earthquakes, hurricanes, and outbreaks of infectious diseases such as Dengue. Salvadoran soldiers also support police in counternarcotics efforts, anti-gang patrols, rural patrols, customs inspections, and reform-school training for juvenile convicts.

¶5. (C) The ESAF continues to focus on force modernization in a constrained budget environment. The ESAF currently has approximately 12,000 total service members and 2,500 administrative personnel. The ESAF's funding level of USD 111 million has changed very little for several years, representing a slightly declining percentage of the national budget. The USD 5 million increase for the ESAF in the latest budget is obligated to a pay raise, so there is no net increase in funds available for operations, training, maintenance, and modernization. While El Salvador currently receives modest FMF allocations, (2nd highest in this AOR), military officials have expressed their desire for considerable increases. The focus of our FMF expenditures is on developing host nation capabilities in disaster relief, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and illicit trafficking.

OIF Service

¶6. (U) Since August 2003, the GOES has deployed over 3000 troops to Iraq. The first two contingents consisted of 360 troops while the 3rd through 8th consisted of 380. The 1st and 2nd contingents were primarily charged with security and stability operations; and it was

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during the 2004 Al Najaf uprising that the first Salvadoran soldier was killed in combat. The 3rd-8th contingents conducted security, humanitarian, and reconstruction efforts while the 9th contingent, which deployed in August 2007 with 280 troops, is primarily conducting HA&R projects as the Division CMIC Battalion. To date, there have been 5 KIAs and 58 WIAs. One soldier, (CPL Platero) has been at BAMC in Texas recovering from a severe leg injury since October 2006 and is expected to remain there another year. The MOD is seeking assistance from DoD in establishing a long-term medical agreement which would support OIF WIA. SOUTHCOM staff is researching/coordinating with OSD. The GOES has pledged to remain as long as needed; Salvadoran counterparts insist that the US stood by them during their difficult times, and that they will stand with us. Salvadoran troops have performed admirably for the last four years. Their performance has been recognized at various levels, to include six soldiers being awarded the Bronze Star by the SECDEF for saving the life of Najaf's Coalition Provisional Authority Provincial Coordinator. In May 2007, President Saca made an unannounced visit to Iraq and personally expressed his gratitude and pride for their tremendous contributions to the reconstruction of Iraq. Last week, a delegation consisting of MOD, CHOD, and three legislators visited the contingent and met with General Petraeus, expressing once again El Salvador's commitment to stay the course.

¶7. (C) Salvadoran soldiers were intimately involved in the training and equipping of the Iraqi Civil Defense Forces in Najaf, Al Hillah, and Al Kut. The national press has positively portrayed the real impact of ESAF efforts and the gratitude of Iraqi provincial leaders. In December 2006 the Legislative Assembly passed a one year extension to President Saca's authority to maintain troops in Iraq through December 2007. The Salvadoran Assembly is expected to vote in the next two weeks to extend the authorization for another year. The GOES and supportive parties await a UNSC resolution to extend the coalition troop presence in Iraq. Public opposition to Salvadoran involvement in Iraq runs as high as 70 percent, but President Saca portrays himself as a faithful friend of the US, and we believe he will work very hard to renew the authorization.

Peacekeeping and International Agreements

18. (SBU) The GOES is interested in peacekeeping opportunities, although the commitment in Iraq and current ESAF budget constraints make such new deployments of troops unlikely for the time being. The UN has certified ESAF as competent for full participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations. Last week the MOD, CHOD, and three legislators went to the UN in an exploratory visit seeking a clear definition as to the type of required units and potential mission participation. The USG has recently released new funding and supplies for training the ESAF to take part in the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) in support of a long-term desire of the Conference of Central American Armed Forces (CFAC) to deploy a combined peacekeeping unit from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. El Salvador is not a signatory to the International Criminal Court, but signed and ratified Article 98 provisions to the Rome Statute with the U.S. in 2004. In late 2006 the legislature approved a 505 Agreement for U.S.-provided assistance; the Assembly has also approved an agreement for the protection of classified military information and the DoD/DoS preferred global format Status of Forces Agreement.

Counternarcotics and Counterterrorism Issues

19. (C) The Salvadoran government is a valuable partner in the war on drugs. El Salvador is a transit country for narcotics, mainly cocaine and heroin. El Salvador is host to Central America's only Cooperative Security Location (CSL), as well as to Latin America's International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), which provides law enforcement training to personnel from El Salvador and the region. The CSL agreement expires 23 Aug 2010. The CT assesses that it is best to renew the agreements now, with the current government, rather than after the 2009 elections. Additionally, it should be negotiated as soon as possible, in order to avoid becoming a political campaign issue in 2008. OSD and DoS are currently working on a draft agreement. President Saca has indicated he is receptive to the idea of expanding authorities beyond the current CN detection and monitoring missions. U.S.-funded training and equipment have contributed significantly to improvements in the National Civilian Police (PNC) Counternarcotics Division. El Salvador's geographic position makes it vulnerable to those trafficking drugs, drug proceeds (in the form of bulk money shipments or remittances), people, and guns to or from the United States. JIATF-South, with its ability to provide Salvadoran authorities with real-time intelligence, is a great asset; however, the ESAF need additional resources to help us take full advantage of JIATF's capabilities.

Glazer